

# THE INTERPERSONAL DIMENSION OF PERSONALITY

*By*

MERVIN B. FREEDMAN AND TIMOTHY F. LEARY

*University of California and Permanente Foundation Hospital*

ABEL G. OSSORIO

*Washington University, St. Louis, Mo.*

HUBERT S. COFFEY

*University of California*

Reprinted from JOURNAL OF PERSONALITY

Vol. 20, No. 2, December, 1951



# The Interpersonal Dimension of Personality<sup>1</sup>

MERVIN B. FREEDMAN AND TIMOTHY F. LEARY

*University of California and Permanente Foundation Hospital*

ABEL G. OSSORIO, *Washington University, St. Louis, Mo.*

HUBERT S. COFFEY, *University of California*

---

IN OUR OPINION a comprehensive schema for description of the much discussed "total personality" is a prime requirement in psychology at this time. The reasons for this need will be elaborated upon below, but may be stated briefly as follows: (1) Current conceptual systems in psychology usually emphasize only one of several areas of personality or one type of datum, e.g., manifest or behavioral traits, central urges, psychodiagnostic categories, etc., and relationships among different areas and levels are but imperfectly dealt with, if at all. (2) Most variables in current use in the field of psychology lack clear or systematic interpersonal reference. (3) For the most part concepts oriented toward psycho-pathological functioning are emphasized, while those dealing with normal functioning are neglected. (4) Many personality variables in current use are not so stated or defined as to permit their objective measurement.

This is the first of a series of articles designed to present a comprehensive schema for the organization of personality data. The system to be described presents an account of the "total personality" based on a tripartite division of personality data (i.e., the "total personality" is described by the nature of the data in each of three

<sup>1</sup> The studies on which this paper is based have been sponsored by Permanente Foundation Hospital, Oakland, California, under the codirection of Hubert S. Coffey, Ph.D., and Harvey Powelson, M.D. The current expanded research project is in part supported by the U. S. Public Health Service under the direction of Saxton T. Pope, Jr., M.D. The authors are grateful to Dr. Jean Walker Macfarlane for her editorial contributions to this article.

A four-year collaborative research study involving 200 subjects has provided the data on which the theories of variables presented in this article are based. For each subject there were available for study the protocols of ten personality tests and approximately one thousand verbal interactions obtained by the wire recording of group psychotherapy sessions.

separate areas and by the interrelationships among these areas). These three divisions of the total personality we have termed the public, the conscious, and the private levels. The variables descriptive of the total personality and its three divisions and the measurement methods involved in their use were derived empirically from work with various types of social interaction data, especially protocols of psychotherapy sessions, and from work with a variety of personality test data. A description of these variables, their conceptual background, and the procedures involved in their measurement comprises the chief focus of attention of this article and those to follow.

Four basic criteria have governed the development and selection of the variables to be described. These are stated as follows: (1) All variables comprising the total personality must be capable of systematic relationship to one another. (2) Each variable must possess interpersonal reference. (3) Variables of personality should reflect with equal facility "normal" or "adjustive" functioning aspects of behavior as well as abnormal or pathological extremes. (4) Each variable must be capable of operational statement. A brief discussion of each of these criteria follows:

(1) The implications of the first criterion, that all variables comprising the total personality be capable of systematic relationship to one another, are perhaps somewhat obscure. A brief survey, however, of the splendid isolation in which many if not most of the current concepts in personality exist would certainly appear to argue for systematic interrelatedness of variables. Thus, concepts of the nature of Murray's needs have been found to be of value in the handling of personality data and are deserving of consideration in any attempt at formulation of the theoretical structure of the total personality. How are these needs related to one another, however? How are Allport's traits related to each other? Jung's types? Rorschach's determinants? Quite clearly, redefinition and restatement of many concepts and variables now in current use in the field of personality are required within the framework of a unified whole. Only under such unification will variables or concepts comprising the total personality bear defined and systematic relationship to one another.

(2) The importance of the second criterion, that each variable

possess systematic interpersonal reference, is perhaps best summed up in the following passage of Ruesch and Bateson:

A necessary part of such an investigation is the creation of concepts and of a language suitable for the communication of what happens between people. Today when interpersonal events are reported they are usually described in terms of the personality structure of the participating individuals or in terms of the structure of society. Omitted are reports about interpersonal processes. This omission is related to the fact that almost all current theories and the terminology for describing human behavior are based upon structural analysis of intrapsychic events in individuals rather than upon description of interpersonal processes taking place between two or more people. (2)

Our emphasis upon the immediate interpersonal aspects of personality may be regarded as an extension of the work of Harry Stack Sullivan (3) and his co-workers and as an attempt to systematize and objectify much that is nonsystematic and qualitative in such work.

(3) The third criterion governing the development and selection of variables was that they should reflect with equal facility "normal" or "adjusted" functioning and abnormal or pathological behavior. It is our belief that the variables of human behavior to be described are equally meaningful and valid through all reaches and types of activity, unlike many personality variables now in current use, which were derived to describe and explain pathological behavior and which lose emphasis and meaning and perhaps even introduce distortion when applied to less aberrant types of behavior. To insure accomplishment of the aims of development of variables applicable to all ranges of behavior we made effort to include in our sample of subjects a significant number of individuals who were not psychiatric patients of any kind, who were acceptably functioning community members, and who therefore may be described as at least a reasonable approximation of normal. Our sample included in addition a number of individuals who may be described as representative of personality aberration of varying degrees and kinds. One of the most important sources of our data was the group psychotherapeutic situation, a social situation which, although a specialized one, is one more closely resembling real life situations than most which are utilized for the obtaining of data for personality research purposes.

(4) The requirement that each variable be capable of operational

statement need hardly be justified. By operational statement we mean simply a listing of all manifestations of a variable and a description of the means by which these manifestations are to be discriminated or measured. Clearly the field of personality currently possesses far too few variables fulfilling this criterion. To cite but a very few offenders, we may point to concepts such as unconscious hostility, the self-system, transference, the persona, etc. Clearly, these concepts have much richness and value of a qualitative sort. However, their usefulness could be increased greatly were they to be defined operationally.

The variables to be described in this and subsequent articles were developed to accord with the criteria outlined above. Some of the variables (e.g., the interpersonal mechanisms) represent original concepts, i.e., concepts designed to fill a gap, to systematize an area of behavior for which no descriptive language exists. Others represent restatement or redefinition of concepts in current use. We have attempted to redefine many psychoanalytic concepts in such a way as to give them systematic interpersonal reference and to permit their measurement by objective means. Similarly, we have attempted to develop a theoretical system wherein many variables of personality that now exist in relative isolation may be systematically related to one another.

The theoretical structure of the "total personality" and the variables comprising it will now be considered. In our theoretical system of organization of personality data, the total personality is considered to consist of three levels, the public, the conscious, and the private. Four types of personality variables have been developed for systematic handling of data at each of these three levels and for dealing with the relationships among the levels. These are the interpersonal mechanism, the interpersonal trait, the intrapersonal mechanism, and the personal mechanism. This paper is concerned with presentation and discussion of only two of these four types of personality variables, the *interpersonal mechanism* and the *interpersonal trait*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Detailed discussion of the organization of the total personality, the relationships among the levels, and the intrapersonal and personal mechanisms will be presented in subsequent publications. The intrapersonal mechanisms are intrapsychic variables derived from analyses of concordances and discrepancies among the three levels of personality data. They appear to offer prospect of making possible rigorous definition of variables of the nature of psychoanalytic ego-defense



## THE TRIPARTITE DIVISION OF PERSONALITY DATA:

## THE PUBLIC, CONSCIOUS, AND PRIVATE LEVELS OF PERSONALITY

The total personality is considered to consist of three levels, the public, the conscious, and the private. These levels are defined by the sources of data which contribute to them (see Table I). The public, conscious, and private levels of personality are defined as follows:

The public level of personality data consists of ratings of how an individual behaves, ratings of the effect an individual has upon others. These judgments, possessing known reliability, are made by trained observers or by fellow experimental subjects. They are independent of the subjective reports of the individuals being rated regarding the meaning of their own behavior. Thus a unit of social or interpersonal behavior may be classified by observers in a way very different from the way in which it would be classified by the subject of the activity under observation.

*The conscious level* of personality data consists of ratings of what the subject says about himself or "others" at a level of apparent conscious awareness. His descriptions of himself and others, the traits he attributes to self and others, are obtained from a variety of sources and are then classified with known reliability. In categorizing these views of self and others the rater is not concerned with the accuracy of the individual's perceptions or descriptions or with potential deeper meanings underlying them. At this level we are interested only in the subject's perceptions at the level at which he is expressing himself.

*The private level* of personality data consists of ratings of projective material, such as TAT stories or accounts of dreams, which are divided into views of self and others and then categorized in accord with the same set of variables used to classify data at the conscious level. It should be noted that data constituting the private level of personality are not considered to be uniformly unconscious or entirely at variance with data of the conscious level. Thus, in

---

mechanisms, description of which has heretofore rested on a more or less intuitive basis. The personal mechanisms represent what might be described as "how" or adverbial qualities. Subsumed under the category of personal mechanisms are variables of the nature of style, mood, or mode, e.g., depressed, rigid, impulsive. The personal mechanisms may be regarded as modifiers of the interpersonal mechanisms and traits much as adverbs are modifiers of verbs and adjectives.

dealing with TAT stories, reports of dreams or waking fantasy, or other projective material, the assumption is not made that the data unequivocally represent or reveal unconscious central motivations. Rather, assignment of certain types of personality data to the private level, as TAT stories, is made on a probability basis. Simply, it is considered likely that some projective data will contain material of which the subject is partly or completely unaware at the level of conscious description, i.e., Level II.

There follows in Table I a presentation of the various sources of data for each area or level of the tripartite division of personality. For sake of convenience each level has been given a numerical code as indicated in the table.

TABLE I

## SOURCES OF DATA FOR THE TRIPARTITE DIVISION OF PERSONALITY

## Public Level—Level I

Ratings of behavior or performance by professional observers or by fellow subjects or patients, e.g., sociometric ratings, in social situations of the following type:

- Individual psychotherapy
- Group psychotherapy
- Assessment situations
- Play situations

## Conscious Level—Level II

Ratings of subjects' descriptions or perceptions of self and others as obtained from sources of the following type:

- Autobiography
- Content of verbalizations in psychotherapy
- Interview
- Questionnaire
- Personality inventory
- Adjective Check List

## Private Level—Level III

Ratings of patients' or subjects' descriptions of self and others as obtained from sources of the following type:

- Dreams
- Waking fantasies
- Creative or artistic productions
- Thematic Apperception Test

An illustration of ratings of behavior at the three levels of personality may prove helpful at this point. If a subject be rated as displaying aggressive behavior in a unit of interpersonal action, a rating of hostility is then



coded into the matrix of Level I variables. Should this same subject describe himself at a conscious level, as on an adjective check list, as aggressive, a Level II rating of hostility would be made. Finally, should the subject report a dream in which the hero behaves in hostile fashion, a rating of hostility would be coded into the matrix of Level III variables.

### THE INTERPERSONAL VARIABLES OF PERSONALITY

#### *The Variables of Level I, the Public Level—the Interpersonal Mechanisms*

The variables to be presented in this subsection appear adequate to the task of systematizing immediate interpersonal behavior, Level I data. The chief concept employed for this purpose is that of the *interpersonal mechanism*, which is defined as the interpersonal function of a unit of social behavior. The rater or observer of interpersonal activity asks the following question: What is the subject of the activity, i.e., the individual whose behavior is being rated, doing to the object or objects of the activity? The answer, e.g., he is aggressing against him or them, affiliating with them, teaching him, etc., is the interpersonal mechanism. Thus, the concept of the interpersonal mechanism may be seen as a product of commitment to a dynamic, functional theory of personality; i.e., the concept of the interpersonal mechanism is based upon the fundamental theoretical assumption that all human behavior is purposeful and therefore may be subjected to functional analysis.

An important methodological consideration in the rating of interpersonal mechanisms is the locus of observation or frame of reference for the judgments of the rater. It is considered that the following passage of Bales<sup>3</sup> presents with clarity the point of view of the observer:

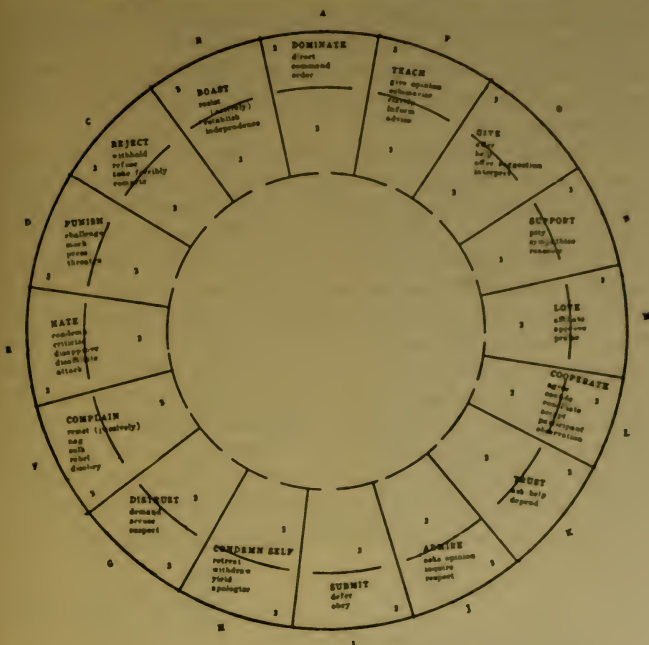
The observer attempts to take the "role of the generalized other" with regard to the actor. That is, the observer tries to think of himself as a generalized group member, or, insofar as he can, as the specific other to whom the actor is talking, or toward whom the actor's behavior is directed, or by whom the actor's behavior is perceived. The observer then endeavors to classify the act of the actor according to its instrumental or expressive

<sup>3</sup> Bales (1) has developed a body of methods and concepts for description of social interaction in small groups. His variables display considerable overlap with the interpersonal mechanisms presented in this article. It is interesting to note this overlap inasmuch as both sets of variables were independently developed, especially since Bales as a sociologist may perhaps be described as more interested in social interaction as such than in the individual personality structure of the participants or subjects, the latter being the main focus of attention of the research herein described.

significance to that other group member. In other words the observer attempts to put himself in the shoes of the person the actor is acting toward and then asks himself: "If this fellow (the actor) were acting toward me (a group member) in this way, what would his act mean to me? . . . or what does his act reveal to me about him or his present emotional or psychological state? . . ." The observer assumes that in any given interaction the group member to whom the actor is talking is trying to put himself in the actor's shoes, and that by this process the group member helps himself to arrive at an understanding of what the actor is trying to do. . . . The observer assumes that the other, or group member, is attempting to empathize with the actor and, at the same time, is testing his own reaction to what he perceives—all of this as a basic process in communication. The observer carries the complication one step further by trying to empathize with the other or group member as the group member perceived the actor. All categories are described in terms which assume the point of view of the group member toward whom the action is directed. The actor . . . is the actor as seen by the other, as seen in turn by the observer. Although this point of view is theoretically complicated, in practice there seems to be little confusion about it, apparently because it is so similar to the point of view from which we ordinarily apprehend action when we are one of the participants. (1, pp. 39)

All the interpersonal mechanisms considered to be required for systematizing interpersonal behavior are presented below in Figure 1, arranged in the form of a continuum, a circle. Examination of the mechanisms as arranged along the perimeter and interior of the circle will indicate that all may be regarded as falling at one of four nodal points or as a blending or combination of these nodal mechanisms. The nodal points are those of dominance, hostility, submission, and affiliation. Thus, the mechanism of "support" represents a blending of both affiliation and dominance; that of "resist," a blending of direction and hostility; that of "asks help," a blending of deference and affiliation, etc. The circle of mechanisms presented below represents the optimal degree of refinement of interpersonal behavior for most tasks. Attempts at greater refinement of systematization of interpersonal behavior by increasing the number of mechanisms leads to difficulties in establishment of clear criteria for discrimination between neighboring mechanisms. On the other hand, use of grosser units of discrimination, e.g., only nodal mechanisms, results in neglect of important discriminable shadings of interpersonal intent.

Each of the 16 interpersonal mechanisms presented in Figure 1 has been assigned to a lettered code. Thus, dominant behavior is classified under the letter "A," teaching behavior under the letter



## INTENSITY RATINGS

3 = intense or extreme

2 = average or appropriate

1 = mild intensity

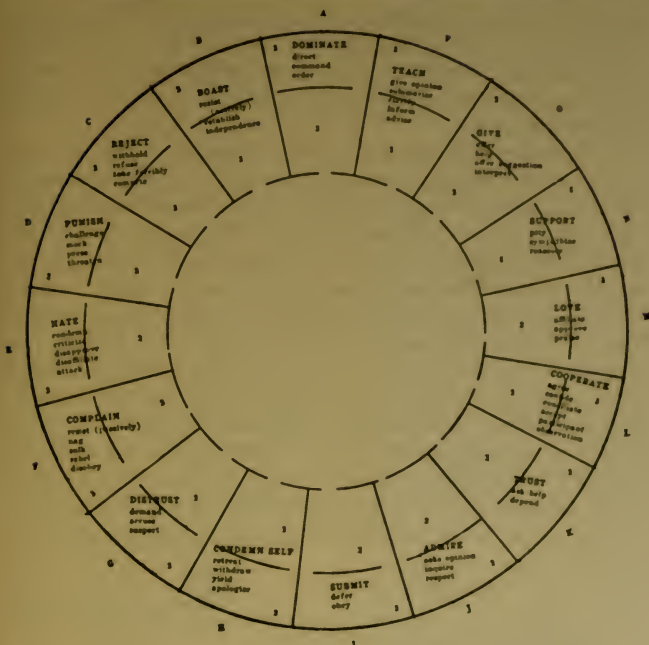
FIG. 1. Level I variables: interpersonal mechanisms with illustrative verbs.

"P," etc. In classifying social behavior we are attempting to describe an action, i.e., interaction process. Accordingly, the appropriate descriptive term is a verb. Several verbs which are characteristic of each generic type of interpersonal purpose are included in Figure 1. The listing of sample verbs serves as an aid to rating and conveniently illustrates the types of behavior subsumed under each point or sector of the circular continuum. Actually, there is an almost inexhaustible list of verbs for each generic code letter. Thus, we suggest that "to ridicule," "to challenge," "to punish," "to press

significance to that other group member. In other words the observer attempts to put himself in the shoes of the person the actor is acting toward and then asks himself: "If this fellow (the actor) were acting toward me (a group member) in this way, what would his act mean to me? . . . or what does his act reveal to me about him or his present emotional or psychological state? . . ." The observer assumes that in any given interaction the group member to whom the actor is talking is trying to put himself in the actor's shoes, and that by this process the group member helps himself to arrive at an understanding of what the actor is trying to do. . . . The observer assumes that the other, or group member, is attempting to empathize with the actor and, at the same time, is testing his own reaction to what he perceives—all of this as a basic process in communication. The observer carries the complication one step further by trying to empathize with the other or group member as the group member perceived the actor. All categories are described in terms which assume the point of view of the group member toward whom the action is directed. The actor . . . is the actor as seen by the other, as seen in turn by the observer. Although this point of view is theoretically complicated, in practice there seems to be little confusion about it, apparently because it is so similar to the point of view from which we ordinarily apprehend action when we are one of the participants. (1, pp. 39)

All the interpersonal mechanisms considered to be required for systematizing interpersonal behavior are presented below in Figure 1, arranged in the form of a continuum, a circle. Examination of the mechanisms as arranged along the perimeter and interior of the circle will indicate that all may be regarded as falling at one of four nodal points or as a blending or combination of these nodal mechanisms. The nodal points are those of dominance, hostility, submission, and affiliation. Thus, the mechanism of "support" represents a blending of both affiliation and dominance; that of "resist," a blending of direction and hostility; that of "asks help," a blending of deference and affiliation, etc. The circle of mechanisms presented below represents the optimal degree of refinement of interpersonal behavior for most tasks. Attempts at greater refinement of systematization of interpersonal behavior by increasing the number of mechanisms leads to difficulties in establishment of clear criteria for discrimination between neighboring mechanisms. On the other hand, use of grosser units of discrimination, e.g., only nodal mechanisms, results in neglect of important discriminable shadings of interpersonal intent.

Each of the 16 interpersonal mechanisms presented in Figure 1 has been assigned to a lettered code. Thus, dominant behavior is classified under the letter "A," teaching behavior under the letter



## INTENSITY RATINGS

3 = intense or extreme

2 = average or appropriate

1 = mild intensity

FIG. 1. Level I variables: interpersonal mechanisms with illustrative verbs.

"P," etc. In classifying social behavior we are attempting to describe an action, i.e., interaction process. Accordingly, the appropriate descriptive term is a verb. Several verbs which are characteristic of each generic type of interpersonal purpose are included in Figure 1. The listing of sample verbs serves as an aid to rating and conveniently illustrates the types of behavior subsumed under each point or sector of the circular continuum. Actually, there is an almost inexhaustible list of verbs for each generic code letter. Thus, we suggest that "to ridicule," "to challenge," "to punish," "to press



a point" all contain just about the same proportion of hostile dominance indicated by the position "D" on the circle. In practice, ratings should be oriented around location of the mechanism on the circle, the accompanying verbs serving only as descriptions of the point decided upon.

An additional differentiation of the matrix of interpersonal behavior, Level I, consists of ratings of intensity on a three-point scale for each interpersonal mechanism. This dimension of intensity is indicated in Figure 1. A rating of "3" indicates an extreme interaction, an interpersonal mechanism of high intensity; a rating of "2" indicates an interaction of average or moderate intensity; a rating of "1" indicates an interaction of but low or mild intensity. A zero rating of an interpersonal mechanism represents the absence of a discernible or ratable amount of activity of that type. The dimension of intensity is important in defining normal or generally well-adjusted behavior as opposed to abnormal extremes. Generally, consistent display of interpersonal mechanisms of 3 or 1 ratings of intensity would indicate inappropriate or rigid social behavior, while 2 ratings represent for the most part flexibility or social adaptiveness.

Patient	Group Psychotherapy Passage	Inter- personal Mechanism	Descrip- tive verb	Inten- sity
AA	(completing a statement made by BB) Yeah, and you won't be pushed. You think it was only your Father that pushed you before? I think you resented being pushed regardless of the circumstances. It <i>might</i> even go back to your Father.	P	interpret	2
BB	You might be right. I don't know.	L B	accept resist	1 1
AA	I'm not going to be pushed around either. I would have reacted as you did in that situation.	M L	affiliate inform	2 2
CC	Well, I don't know. If I go into a restaurant and somebody is eating rather noisily, I don't know, I just have this compulsion to grab whatever is on my plate and throw it at him.	L	confide	2
BB	Why? Why do you react that way?	J	inquire	1
CC	I don't know why.	L	inform	1
AA	Because his mother continually said, "Donnie, be quiet when you eat."	P	interpret	2



To illustrate ratings of interpersonal behavior three samples of interaction are here presented; a portion of a group therapy situation, a section of a modern play, and a nonverbal nursery school interaction.

*The scoring of interpersonal mechanisms as applied to interaction in a group psychotherapeutic situation.* The passage presented on page 152 was transcribed from a wire recording of a group psychotherapeutic situation. The interpersonal mechanisms are scored at the right. The scoring of each mechanism consists of three ratings; the code letter representative of the location of the action along the circular continuum of interpersonal mechanisms, the verb considered most closely descriptive of the action represented by the code letter, and the rating of intensity of the mechanism along the three-point scale. In practice the scoring of the descriptive verb may be omitted.

---

	Inter- personal Mechanism	Descrip- tive verb	Inten- sity
Linda: You're a pair of animals! Not one, not another living soul would have had the cruelty to walk out on that man in a restaurant.	E	Condemn	3
Biff, not looking at her: Is that what he said?	J	Inquire	1
Linda: He didn't have to say anything. He was so humiliated he nearly limped when he came in.	P	Inform	1
Happy: But, Mom, he had a great time with us.	L B	Conciliate Resist	2 1
Biff, cutting him off violently: Shut up.	D	Coerce	3
Without another word, Happy goes upstairs.	H	Withdraw	3
Linda: You! You didn't even go to see if he was all right!	F	Complain	2
Biff, still on the floor in front of Linda, the flowers in his hand; with self-loathing: No, Didn't. Didn't do a damned thing. How do you like that, heh? Left him babbling in a toilet.	H	Condemn self	3
Linda: You louse. You.	E	Condemn	3
Biff: Now you hit it on the nose! He gets up, throws flowers in the wastebasket: The scum of the earth, and you're looking at him!	H	Condemn self	3
Linda: Get out of here!	D	Coerce	3

---

*The scoring of interpersonal mechanisms as applied to a conversation in a play.* The passage presented on page 153 represents a conversation among three of the central characters of *Death of a Salesman*, by Arthur Miller.<sup>4</sup> The interpersonal mechanisms are scored in the same fashion as described above for the group psychotherapy passage.

*The scoring of interpersonal mechanisms as applied to nonverbal interaction in a nursery-school situation.* Presented below are qualitative descriptions of the behavior of two children and a teacher in a nursery-school situation. The interpersonal mechanisms are scored in the same fashion as for the verbal interchanges described above.

---

		Inter- personal Mechanism	Descrip- tive verb	Inten- sity
Child B	Runs up and tries to pull drum away.	C	Takes by force	3
Child A	Refuses to let go.	C	Withholds	2
Child B	Socks child A in stomach and pulls drum away.	E C	Attacks Takes by force	3 3
Child A	Runs away and cries and sobs loudly.	H F	Withdraws Complains	3 3
Nursery Teacher	Picks up child A and pats him.	N	Sympathizes	2
Child A	Cries louder and kicks heels against Teacher's stomach.	F E	complains attacks	3 3
Teacher	Brings child to toy box and gives him a red truck	O	gives	2

---

It is to be noted that judgment of interpersonal mechanisms is quite independent of the concrete form or medium of their expression. For example, the mechanism of support could be scored for a nonverbal action, as a pat on the back, for a solely verbal action, or for a combination of both. Similarly, two verbal actions of quite different content may receive the same score or, dependent upon the context, the same activity may receive different scorings at different times.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, New York: Viking Press, 1949, pp. 124-125; quoted by permission of the publisher.

The interpersonal mechanisms presented above were developed for the purpose of conceptualizing and systematizing the interactions occurring in a group psychotherapeutic situation. They represent the products of analysis of some eight thousand units of verbal behavior. For three trained raters percentages of complete inter-rater agreement in judgment of the mechanisms ranged from 68 to 77 (see Table II below). Although we have not attempted to ascertain percentages of inter-rater agreement in judgment of the interpersonal mechanisms displayed in essentially nonverbal behavior, e.g., the interaction of nursery school children, it is our opinion that such behavior can be rated with an equal level of agreement.

TABLE II

PERCENTAGES OF INTER-RATER AGREEMENT IN JUDGMENT OF INTERPERSONAL MECHANISMS PRIOR TO CONSENSUAL POOLING

	<i>Percentage of Agreement</i>	<i>SE</i>
Agreement of all three judges.....	74	1.4
Agreement of two judges; disagreement of one.....	14	1.1
Disagreement among all three judges.....	12	1.0

PERCENTAGE OF AGREEMENT OF INDEPENDENT INDIVIDUAL JUDGMENTS WITH THE GROUP CONSENSUS

<i>Rater</i>	<i>Percentage of Agreement</i>	<i>SE</i>
No. 1 .....	68	1.0
No. 2 .....	75	1.4
No. 3 .....	77	1.7

It is our belief that the concept of the interpersonal mechanism makes possible precise and yet meaningful description of social behavior. An individual's social role may be described in quantitative terms, e.g., of the total number of mechanisms displayed in the sample of behavior under study 20 per cent are deferent, 15 per cent affiliative, 30 per cent dominating, etc. Thus, individuals may be compared with one another as regards their interpersonal activity and may be described as more or less hostile, affiliative, deferent, etc., than others in accord with the relative amounts of the various mechanisms that are displayed. In addition the interpersonal mechanisms may be utilized to systematize the social environment data or presses impinging upon an individual. The presses to which an individual is subjected are merely the interpersonal mechanisms of the individuals with whom he is interacting which are directed toward

dealing with TAT stories, reports of dreams or waking fantasy, or other projective material, the assumption is not made that the data unequivocally represent or reveal unconscious central motivations. Rather, assignment of certain types of personality data to the private level, as TAT stories, is made on a probability basis. Simply, it is considered likely that some projective data will contain material of which the subject is partly or completely unaware at the level of conscious description, i.e., Level II.

There follows in Table I a presentation of the various sources of data for each area or level of the tripartite division of personality. For sake of convenience each level has been given a numerical code as indicated in the table.

TABLE I

## SOURCES OF DATA FOR THE TRIPARTITE DIVISION OF PERSONALITY

## Public Level—Level I

Ratings of behavior or performance by professional observers or by fellow subjects or patients, e.g., sociometric ratings, in social situations of the following type:

- Individual psychotherapy
- Group psychotherapy
- Assessment situations
- Play situations

## Conscious Level—Level II

Ratings of subjects' descriptions or perceptions of self and others as obtained from sources of the following type:

- Autobiography
- Content of verbalizations in psychotherapy
- Interview
- Questionnaire
- Personality inventory
- Adjective Check List

## Private Level—Level III

Ratings of patients' or subjects' descriptions of self and others as obtained from sources of the following type:

- Dreams
- Waking fantasies
- Creative or artistic productions
- Thematic Apperception Test

An illustration of ratings of behavior at the three levels of personality may prove helpful at this point. If a subject be rated as displaying aggressive behavior in a unit of interpersonal action, a rating of hostility is then

coded into the matrix of Level I variables. Should this same subject describe himself at a conscious level, as on an adjective check list, as aggressive, a Level II rating of hostility would be made. Finally, should the subject report a dream in which the hero behaves in hostile fashion, a rating of hostility would be coded into the matrix of Level III variables.

### THE INTERPERSONAL VARIABLES OF PERSONALITY

#### *The Variables of Level I, the Public Level—the Interpersonal Mechanisms*

The variables to be presented in this subsection appear adequate to the task of systematizing immediate interpersonal behavior, Level I data. The chief concept employed for this purpose is that of the *interpersonal mechanism*, which is defined as the interpersonal function of a unit of social behavior. The rater or observer of interpersonal activity asks the following question: What is the subject of the activity, i.e., the individual whose behavior is being rated, doing to the object or objects of the activity? The answer, e.g., he is aggressing against him or them, affiliating with them, teaching him, etc., is the interpersonal mechanism. Thus, the concept of the interpersonal mechanism may be seen as a product of commitment to a dynamic, functional theory of personality; i.e., the concept of the interpersonal mechanism is based upon the fundamental theoretical assumption that all human behavior is purposeful and therefore may be subjected to functional analysis.

An important methodological consideration in the rating of interpersonal mechanisms is the locus of observation or frame of reference for the judgments of the rater. It is considered that the following passage of Bales<sup>3</sup> presents with clarity the point of view of the observer:

The observer attempts to take the "role of the generalized other" with regard to the actor. That is, the observer tries to think of himself as a generalized group member, or, insofar as he can, as the specific other to whom the actor is talking, or toward whom the actor's behavior is directed, or by whom the actor's behavior is perceived. The observer then endeavors to classify the act of the actor according to its instrumental or expressive

<sup>3</sup> Bales (1) has developed a body of methods and concepts for description of social interaction in small groups. His variables display considerable overlap with the interpersonal mechanisms presented in this article. It is interesting to note this overlap inasmuch as both sets of variables were independently developed, especially since Bales as a sociologist may perhaps be described as more interested in social interaction as such than in the individual personality structure of the participants or subjects, the latter being the main focus of attention of the research



him. Such additional usage of the concept of interpersonal mechanism as press comes closer to a field theoretical point of view in approach to social behavior than does description of such behavior utilizing only the interpersonal mechanism alone. Thus, we may say that in response to the press of domination an individual tends to respond submissively or resistively, etc. Further refinements of such description of social behavior may be carried out where permitted by the data. Thus, we may say of an individual that when subjected to the press of dominance by women, he tends to respond with the mechanism of resistance, whereas when subjected to the press of dominance by men, he tends to respond with the mechanism of deference. All such statements may, of course, be set forth in quantitative terms. In short, we believe that the concept of interpersonal mechanism permits of social-role description having a firm objective basis, i.e., description based on clearly defined criteria of types of behavior measured with known accuracy.

*The Variables of Levels II and III, the Conscious and  
Private Levels—the Interpersonal Traits*

The interpersonal mechanisms are regarded as process variables of personality as distinguished from structural variables of personality, following the distinction made by Ruesch and Bateson in the passage quoted above. They are regarded as descriptive of immediate interpersonal processes, the "personality in action," so to speak. The concept of *interpersonal trait* has been developed to systematize the structural variables or enduring tendencies of personality. The interpersonal mechanisms displayed by an individual in a social situation may be considered to be the outcome of an interplay between environmental forces impinging upon him and those enduring tendencies to action which he brings to the situation. These latter structural elements of personality may be thought of as conscious or private tendencies to perceive and respond selectively to certain classes of environmental stimuli, as "the perceptual readinesses" of Tolman (4) or the "parataxic processes" of Sullivan (3). These perceptual readinesses represent one type of structural variable.<sup>5</sup>

The interpersonal trait is an attribute or adjective descriptive

<sup>5</sup> Examples of other types of structural variables are the intrapersonal ego defense mechanisms and personal traits referred to in footnote 2, page 146.



of the potentialities of an individual for interpersonal action. Just as verbs are the convenient and conventional way of summarizing action and interaction, we believe that adjectives best systematize the enduring tendencies which govern self and world perception.<sup>6</sup> As used to systematize the conscious and private levels of description of personality, the interpersonal trait represents the potentialities for interpersonal action perceived by individuals within themselves and others (others being figures such as parents, authorities, love objects, etc.). In short, the interpersonal trait enables systematization of the way in which an individual consciously or privately perceives his social world, including himself. Thus, individuals consciously or symbolically describe themselves as loving, supporting, retreating, etc., in certain situations, and they describe others in similar fashion.

The interpersonal traits were developed by simply replacing the verbs descriptive of the interpersonal mechanisms with their co-ordinate adjectives or with the adjectives that appear to describe appropriately individuals who engage in activities of such nature; e.g., the adjectives or interpersonal traits co-ordinate with the A-2 verb or interpersonal mechanism, "direct," are "strong" and "commanding"; the adjectives co-ordinate with the A-3 mechanism, "dominate," are "bossy" and "domineering," etc.

Several adjectives which are characteristic of each generic interpersonal trait, i.e., each point or sector of the circular continuum of interpersonal traits, are included in Figure 2. Like the corresponding lists of verbs or interpersonal mechanisms these adjectives are suggestive and illustrative and are by no means exhaustive of the entire listing of traits. The ratings of interpersonal traits are divided into self and other. As in the case of scoring interpersonal mechanisms, the interpersonal traits are rated along a three-point scale, 3 indicating high intensity, 2 moderate intensity, and 1 mild intensity. Such rating along an intensity dimension illustrates the assertion made earlier that the system to be described reflects with equal facility normal or adjusted functioning as well as abnormal or pathological extremes of behavior. Consistent rat-

<sup>6</sup> By this we mean that any personal or private description of self or others is in the basic sense attributive. The statement of subjects about self and world are thus considered as *subjective*. They may correspond to the report of another observer, or they may not.



FIG. 2. Level II and III variables: interpersonal traits with illustrative adjectives at two degrees of intensity.

ings of 2 represent for the most part what may be described as flexible or appropriate perception, while consistent ratings of 1 or 3 would tend to indicate probabilities of rigidity or imbalance in perception of self and other. Thus, one type of personality abnormality may be considered to be rigid imbalance in perception of self or other at either the conscious or private levels. The concepts of parataxic experience of Sullivan and transference of psychoanalysis appear to be examples of such rigid imbalance of perception. Thus, possibilities exist for objective or quantitative description of such concepts.

Table III below contains percentages of inter-rater agreement for three trained raters in judgment of the interpersonal traits. The percentages of complete agreement range from sixty to seventy-two.

TABLE III

## PERCENTAGES OF INTER-RATER AGREEMENT IN JUDGMENT OF INTERPERSONAL TRAITS PRIOR TO CONSENSUAL POOLING

	Percentage of Agreement	SE
agreement of all three judges.....	63	1.7
agreement of two judges; disagreement of one.....	20	1.4
disagreement among all three judges.....	17	1.3

## PERCENTAGE OF AGREEMENT OF INDEPENDENT INDIVIDUAL JUDGMENTS WITH THE GROUP CONSENSUS

ater	Percentage of Agreement	SB
o. 1 .....	60	1.7
o. 2 .....	68	1.6
o. 3 .....	72	1.6

*The scoring of interpersonal traits at the conscious level.* To illustrate the rating of interpersonal traits at the conscious level, the level of conscious self-description, there follow examples of ratings of an adjective check list, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, the content of therapy sessions, and an autobiography.

## The Scoring of Interpersonal Traits as Applied to an Adjective Check List:

Adjective	Trait	Intensity
stubborn.....	B	3
proud.....	B	2
bossy.....	A	3
good-leader.....	A	2
reserved.....	H	2
withdrawn.....	H	3

## The Scoring of Interpersonal Traits as Applied to the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory:

Item	Self or Other	Inter- personal Trait	Intensity
have been quite independent and free from family rule.	self	A	2
people say insulting and vulgar things about me.	other	D	3
feel unable to tell anyone all about myself.	self	H	2

## The Scoring of Interpersonal Traits as Applied to the Content of Discussion of a Group Psychotherapy Session:

Other	Self
C-3, A-2	And since I've been married I've been able to make a substitute, a transference of these feelings from my mother to my wife. I guess I <i>depend</i> on my wife a lot, more than I should. She is a <i>strong</i> person. K-3
A-3, A-2	She admires strength. I think it makes her <i>retract, withdraw</i> from me when I am <i>dependent</i> on her. This makes me feel worse. Then K-3
	she tries to <i>drive me</i> . She's an <i>ambitious</i> person. It makes me feel very <i>helpless</i> . This is a real vicious circle and it has me worried. I-3

d. The Scoring of Interpersonal Traits as Applied to an Autobiography:

Other	Self
A-2	I guess I was a very <i>co-operative</i> child, but this is just from what I've heard. I've always been <i>timid</i> all my life. This is especially true with girls. I believe my parents realized this and often, especially my mother, tried to <i>push me</i> a little which I resented and probably <i>went out of my way to do the opposite</i> . I have always <i>resented</i> and still do, F-3
A-3	being told what to do or obviously <i>being led</i> . F-3

*The scoring of interpersonal traits at the private level.* To illustrate the rating of interpersonal traits at the Private Level, examples have been selected from a Thematic Apperception Test story and a dream as reported in a group therapy session.

a. The Scoring of Interpersonal Traits as Applied to the Thematic Apperception Test:

Other	Self
D-3, C-3	They probably got up and had breakfast, mother and daughter. The daughter looks like she <i>hates</i> her, the mother. I suppose because of her <i>stern look</i> . Her body shows no emotion. I think she'll <i>run away</i> , but it isn't from the school—because she <i>hates</i> H-2, E-3
	her mother who is <i>unkind</i> and <i>doesn't show her any love</i> . My own experience tells me she <i>runs away</i> . H-2

b. The Scoring of Interpersonal Traits as Applied to a Dream:

Other	Self
C-3	I am in a big house. Suppose it was fraternity. There were <i>pick-pockets</i> present, referred to as <i>stiffs</i> in the dream. I was watching their technique. I was an <i>observer</i> . I was a little bit <i>indignant</i> , although not much. I was bumped into by several of them as though H-2, E-1
C-2	<i>my pockets were to be picked</i> and I started <i>talking</i> to one of the fellows. L-1
D-2	I didn't know if it was the way out of the situation but I began to <i>argue</i> with him about the aesthetics of pick-pocketing and how much of an art it was and somehow we <i>got into an argument</i> . I don't know what happened but he ended up on the floor and I was <i>banging him</i> D-2
	on the head. Then there was a gun. All of a sudden I <i>shot him</i> E-3
	several times. I felt quite <i>justified</i> for this act. E-3 B-3

## SUMMARY

This is the first of a series of papers designed to present a comprehensive schema for the organization of personality data. Four criteria have governed the development and selection of the variables

contained in this schema. They are systematic inter-relatedness, interpersonal reference, encompassing of normal as well as abnormal functioning, and operational statement.

The data comprising the "total personality" are divided into three areas or levels in accordance with the operations by which they are obtained. These are the Public Level, the level of interpersonal interaction; the Conscious Level, the level of conscious description of the self and others; and the Private Level, the level of symbolic description of the self and others.

The data of the Public Level of personality are systematized by means of the concept of the interpersonal mechanism, which is defined as the interpersonal function of a unit of social behavior. Sixteen interpersonal mechanisms have been derived, which may be arranged in the form of a circular continuum.

The data of the Conscious and Private Levels of Personality may be systematized by means of the concept of the interpersonal trait. The interpersonal trait is defined as an attribute or adjective descriptive of the potentialities of an individual for interpersonal action. The interpersonal traits are adjectival equivalents of the interpersonal mechanisms and may similarly be arranged in the form of a circular continuum.

Percentages of inter-rater agreement in judgment of the interpersonal mechanisms and traits and samples of their scoring have been presented. The systematic organization of the three levels of personality data by means of intrapersonal or intrapsychic mechanisms and matrices of personal style and mood variables which were briefly mentioned in this article will be discussed in detail in subsequent publications.

#### REFERENCES

1. BALES, ROBERT F. *Interaction process analysis*. Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Press, Inc., 1950.
2. RUESCH, JURGEN, AND BATESON, GREGORY. Structure and process in social relations. *Psychiat.*, 1949, 12, 105-124.
3. SULLIVAN, HARRY STACK. Conceptions of modern psychiatry. *Psychiat.*, 1940, 3, 1-117.
4. TOLMAN, EDWARD C. The psychology of social learning. *J soc. Issues*, Supplement Series No. 3, 1949.







